

DECISION NOTICE

MAKOSHIKA STATE PARK FINAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Ave South
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to adopt the Makoshika State Park Final Management Plan and implement the outlined actions over the next ten years.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The Makoshika State Park management planning process was undertaken in 2003 beginning with a visitor survey and ongoing input from a public advisory committee. The committee reviewed and commented on the draft plan before it was released for public comment on July 3, 2005. News releases, legal notices and advertisements placed in the local newspaper, radio advertisements, direct mailings, and Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) web page announcements alerted the public about the draft plan and the opportunity to comment. The 30-day comment period included an open house held at the park on July 14. FWP met directly with the County Commissioners, Chamber of Commerce, several community service group representatives, as well as many individuals in the community during the comment period, which ended August 8.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Thirty-four comments were submitted during the formal comment period. The draft management plan was modified in response to many of these comments. A summary of issues raised are listed below with FWP's response in italic text.

Rifle Range

The rifle range should not be relocated. Increase safety at the existing range. *FWP understands the importance of a rifle range to local residents and supports the need for rifle ranges across the state. FWP's primary concern is the safety and perceived safety*

of all park visitors. The existing rifle range location conflicts with other nearby visitor use. The agency must be proactive to prevent an accident. The existing rifle range will remain open until a new site is acquired, developed and operable. Safety at the existing range will be improved through signing and facility maintenance; however, the site may be closed if a shooting related accident occurs.

The new range should remain public and managed by FWP. An advisory committee is recommended to aid in the range transition, development and management. FWP has adopted these recommendation. FWP will convene an advisory committee representing hunting, shooting and non-shooting interests. FWP will manage the range until a suitable non-profit partnership is found to help with these duties.

Communication Towers

Relocating or eliminating communication towers in the park would impact public emergency communications services. Relocation would be costly to the public. FWP recognizes these concerns and will not jeopardize public safety. The final plan specifies that the Glendive City Police and Montana Department of Transportation public towers, and the Lower Yellowstone Amateur Radio System antennae will continue their fee-exempt status as long as they are providing public emergency services. FWP will cooperate with the Eastern Tier Interoperability Consortium to develop a multi-agency communications system. Overall, FWP intentions remain to:

- *consolidate tower uses where feasible,*
- *evaluate and revise lease agreements to meet agency standards and statutory fair market rate obligations where applicable, and*
- *eliminate towers with expired leases as possible.*

Paleontological Resources

Increase consultation with professional paleontologists and increase staff paleontology education. These recommendations were incorporated into the final plan.

Investigate whether the visitor center should become a satellite state paleontological repository. This recommendation was incorporated into the final plan.

Wildlife

Introduce bighorn sheep and buffalo in the park. The local and regional wildlife biologists recommend against these wildlife introductions. The lack of water in the park and associated costs to install and maintain water are a primary concern. In addition, the difficulty containing wild populations in the park, and the relatively close proximity of domestic livestock contribute to this decision.

Miscellaneous

Increase summer visitor center hours from 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. to 9 a.m. – 7 p.m. FWP will pursue funding and volunteers to expand the daily visitor center hours between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Improve maintenance of park grounds, systems, facilities and equipment. *Actions to improve maintenance were added to the final plan.*

Impacts and project costs should be known prior to approving the management plan. *Individual projects within the plan are subject to the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), which requires all human and environmental impacts and costs to be assessed. FWP will notify the public of these findings, as required by State law. Further research, future costs, available funding and additional public comment obtained through the MEPA process may deem a project unfeasible. Approving the management plan does not guarantee that the plan's actions will be implemented.*


Grazing should not be permitted in the park. Domestic animals do not belong in the park. Fencing would obstruct free use of the park. *FWP will retain the option to use controlled domestic livestock grazing to meet management goals, particularly to control weeds. The decision to allow grazing in the park would be based on an environmental assessment of the human and physical environment impacts. A range assessment would be conducted every two years thereafter, if grazing occurs.*

Increase multi-use trails in the park and maintain existing trails. Improve trail maps. Consider non-motorized park access from Parkview Drive. Evaluate increased traffic, parking, and security when considering additional park [trails] access. Do not place horse facilities in the campground area. *FWP and a public advisory committee will evaluate all non-motorized trails opportunities and present a trail proposal for the park. A MEPA document will assess impacts of the proposal, including those concerns raised by the public.*


Improve staff and visitor safety, and reduce liability. *Actions to improve safety and reduce liability were added to the final plan.*

APPEALS

This plan is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the FWP Director in writing, and postmarked within 30 days of the date on this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how FWP might address the concerns in the appeal. The appeal should be mailed to Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620. If you have questions regarding this decision notice, please contact the Parks Division at (406) 444-3750.



M. Jeff Hagener, Director
Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Date